

HOWARD, ROBERT P.

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71.2.09.085.05726



# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Robert P. Howard

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**WILLIAM H. BISSELL, LINCOLN'S MAN IN THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE**

It is not an unmixed blessing that much of Illinois history is dominated by the tall figure of Abraham Lincoln. Generations of scholars become so fascinated with the Civil War president that they neglect other men, movements and events of importance in the state. For example, learned books dealing with Lincoln in the 1850's contain only incidental mention of William H. Bissell,<sup>1</sup> the first Republican governor of Illinois.

*Pending*

Robert P. Howard  
March 24, 1983

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, WILLIAM H. BISSELL AND PERJURY

The Illinois Campaign of 1856

William Henry Bissell, who was Abraham Lincoln's candidate for governor of Illinois in 1856, had two major handicaps, either of which normally would disqualify an aspirant for public office. He enjoyed great popularity, but he was a cripple whose paralyzed legs had forced him to give up a career as a Democratic congressman. Of more importance, he would commit perjury if he took an antidiuellng oath required by the state constitution. Nevertheless, in Lincoln's estimation he was the strongest candidate available to the new and unstable antislavery coalition that became the Republican party. 1

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to be made if human bondage was to be confined to the southern and border states. For governor the Democrats nominated William A. Richardson, the right-hand man of Senator Stephen A. Douglas. A former congressman, two years earlier he had been chief House sponsor of the Kansas-Nebraska act that repealed



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